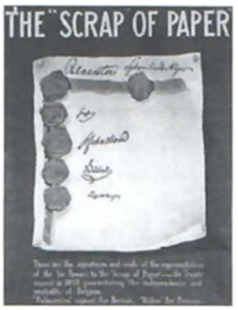
Belgian Neutrality 1914

There is a general opinion that the violation of Belgian neutrality by German troops at the beginning of August 1914 was the main reason for the escalation of the conflict into the First World War and that Germany was therefore primarily responsible for the war.
In view of the looming two-front war, Germany had committed itself to the, albeit watered-down, SCHLIEFFEN plan, which envisaged a comprehensive attack on France via Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg in order to bring about a quick victory on the Western Front. On 3 August 1914, the British ambassador Edward GOSCHEN, who was supposed to obtain an assurance from the Reich government that Germany
would respect Belgian neutrality, received the following reply: "England is about to wage war against a kindred race just for a scrap of paper" (this meant the neutrality document from 1839). In a memorable speech in the Reichstag the next day, 4 August, Chancellor BETHMANNHOLLWEG declared with fatal naivety that necessity knew no law and that Germany had therefore had to invade Belgium, but that Germany would provide compensation
- a real "godsend" for Allied war propaganda. The military writer General John Frederick Charles FuLLER taught,[1] that the treaty between England and Belgium of 1839 contained no provision requiring England to send troops to protect the Belgian borders. Even if Germany had not violated Belgian neutrality, the British general believes, British honour and England's interests would have required it to join France and Russia . And the conversation between GREY and the German ambassador Karl von LYCHNOSWKY on 1 August in London[2] shows that the British government had already made up its mind.

Lord Arthur PONSONBY assured in a newspaper article in the mid-1920s:[3] "Whatever the causes of the World War may have been, the German invasion of Belgium was undoubtedly not one **of them.** It was one of the first consequences of the war. It was not even the reason for our [the British] entry into the war ... Politically , the invasion of Belgium was a great mistake. From a strategic point of view, it was the most natural and obvious path for Germany to choose . The French general Alexandre PERCIN, who had taken part in a major winter manoeuvre in 1910-11, wrote after the war in the journal *Ere Nouvelle:* "The manoeuvre lasted a week and showed that a German attack on the Alsace-Lorraine front had no chance of success, that it would inevitably fail at the fortifications concentrated in this area.



The " scrap of paper " . This means that the treaty from 1839, which guaranteed the neutrality of Belgium, is no longer valid.

[1] John Frederick Charles FULLER, *The decisive battles of the Western world ,* Grabert , Tübingen 2004, p. 390
[2] See article no. 21, *" The Causes of the First World War "*
[3] Arthur PONSONBY, in: *Manchester Guardian* , 27.1.1925

August 4, 1914: German soldiers and Belgian civilians pose next to each other in the Belgian Ardennes.

and that Germany would be forced to violate Belgian neutrality." Léon DEGRELLE, who experienced the German invasion of his Belgian village at the age of nine, took the same view: [4] " For 2000 years, Belgium has always been an inevitable passage, . . . the sidewalk of the warriors. . . The Germans were faced with a choice: either leave the Belgians alone or fail in their offensive against the French. In this great scale of fate, the Belgians, as could be expected, did not weigh very much, just as their predecessors, including the French, had amply demonstrated for five centuries."

In his sensational article, PONSONBY also states that "France would have violated Belgian neutrality if Germany had not done so." PONSONBY is citing General PERCIN. On August 31, 1913, an agreement was signed between France and Russia according to which the term "defensive war" was not to be taken literally and a "powerful offensive . . . should be launched simultaneously." PERCIN concludes : "Could we undertake a powerful offensive without violating Belgian neutrality? Could we really deploy our 1,300,000 men on the narrow front of Alsace-Lorraine ?" An extension of the field of operations could only take place in Belgium.

It is therefore clear that the British and the French had included the violation of Belgian neutrality in their general staff plans for a preemptive strike against Germany. Finally, it should be remembered that in the same war the French also took military action against neutral countries, namely Greece.

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[4] Léon DEGRELLE *La pseudo-guerre du droit<*, Paris 1987 p. 28